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WE REVISIT 1991 FOR THEIR FIRST EVER INTERVIEW

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RADIO head

THEIR FIRST INTERVIEW

In 1993, the ennui of the slacker generation was defined in the year's most nerve-tingling single. The self-deprecating pathos and too loud guitars of 'Creep' gave Radiohead a firm foothold in stardom worldwide, but their story began years before as an unknown Oxford five-piece called On A Friday.

This interview appeared in Oxford's *Curfew* in December 1991, written by the magazine's erstwhile editor Ronan. In 1992, the band were signed to Parlophone and - as Radiohead - released their classic debut album *Pablo Honey*, featuring 'Creep', 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' and 'Stop Whispering'. Earlier in 1995 they returned with *The Bends,* a more polished and pensive album setting them well on the road to stadium rock status. The tiny venues they argued about so vehemently in 1991 - Oxford's Venue and Jericho Tavern - are now long gone and sadly, *Curfew* is gone, too. But with their second album the five Oxford public school boys - Thom Yorke, Ed O'Brien, Colin Greenwood, Jon Greenwood and Phil Selway - have only scratched the surface. Their latest single, 'Just' fills a gap while they tour the world with REM before returning to the UK to play Cambridge Corn Exchange on November 6th.

"The new tape should be available from Manic Hedgehog by the time you read this and it's well worth forking out £3 for."

At the end of October [1991], Oxford's thinnest band (The Wild Poppies split up ages ago), On A Friday, played the Jericho Tavern to a good sized crowd and there was a man from EMI there.

A mere two weeks later they are playing the tavern again and the place is heaving. There are 25 record company A&R men there and, what's more, they have all paid to get in. To put it bluntly, On A Friday are *happening*

It's a good job, then, that we've chosen this month to put them on the front cover. If we'd waited any longer, they'd be splashed all over the nationals and we'd be left with egg all over our faces.

The first time I saw On A Friday I was so drunk I couldn't remember a single thing about them. The second time I saw them I thought they were really rather good, if a little weird. Ironically, I finally realised what a great pop group they were at a pathetically attended gig at the Poly, with crap sound and a ludicrously curtailed set.

While on A Friday's music is lively, catchy and intense and easily good enough to stand up on its own, what makes them just that much better is singer Tom's [sic] voice. He is possessed of that rare and special thing: a naturally musical singing voice. How many bands have you seen ruined by a bad or boring singer? I lost count many years ago. Tom doesn't just deliver his lyrics; he uses his voice to interact with the other instruments, almost as if it were one itself. This often makes the words hard to comprehend. What are the songs about?

Tom: "Erm ... well, 'Nothing Touches Me' is based on an artist who was imprisoned for abusing children and spent the rest of his life in a cell painting, but the song is about isolating yourself so much that one day you realise you haven't got any friends anymore and no one talks to you."

Sounds pretty miserable - but your music is quite happy, isn't it?

"Yeah, I'm just aggressive and sick."

Twenty minutes later, Tom reveals that he doesn't really know *what* the songs are about.

On a Friday, far from being a singer and his backing band, are a collective of five individuals, each with a strong input into the band's music. All stamp their individual influences and tastes on the music and this means that the end product doesn't really sound like anyone else. Tom, Phil (drums), Colin (bass), Ed (guitar) and John [sic](guitar and organ) find common ground in bands like the Buzzcocks, REM, the Fall and (ahem) Peter Paul & Mary (this could be a wind-up) but beyond this they go for anything from Curve to Bootsy Collins to techno. They also seem to argue lots.

They've just been into Courtyard Studios with Chris Hufford, producer of Slowdive's album.

Colin: "He heard about us through a mutual friend and came to see us at the Jericho. Afterwards he was almost shaking. He said we were the best group he'd seen in three years and invited us to record with him at the Courtyard. We see it as an investment."

And the investment seems to be about to pay off sooner than they expected. The five songs they recorded show a massive leap in depth and professionalism from their last demo, impressive though it was. The new tape should be available from Manic Hedgehog by the time you read this and it's well worth forking out £3 for. In short it's a stormer.

All five members of the band are Oxford born and bred and all have returned to their home town after time away at college. How much influence has Oxford had on their songs?

Tom: "Loads. 'Jerusalem' is all about Oxford. So is 'Everybody Lies Through Their Teeth'. It's such a weird place and it's very important to my writing."

It's the subject of Oxford - in particular music in Oxford - which provokes the arguments. Wildly differing views are thrown out as to why Oxford has, or hasn't, got a decent music scene...

"...If the Tavern closed there wouldn't be any scene at all."

"No? What about the Dolly and the Venue? -"

"- And the Old Fire Station? I know it's crap, but there are a lot of towns the size of Oxford haven't got a venue like that. Oxford has got a lot more soul than, say, Cambridge, but it comes from places like Cowley rather than the university. Students come here for three years and leave without contributing anything."

"I don't think it's all the students' fault. It's the people who run the university who are the problem. They control everything in Oxford from their corridors of power. They have a say in all the licensing of clubs. That's why we get terrible places like the Park End Club. Oxford is crying out for a couple of decent nightclubs. And it's the Dons who say that bands can't play in the colleges, not the students..."

The argument continues with no real agreement or fixed conclusions. Everyone agrees that things could be better but they could be a lot worse.

"There are a hell of a lot of bands in Oxford for its size and the Dolly and the Venue and especially the Tavern are good venues. The Old Fire Station looks like it was designed by the people who build Little Chefs. The stage is almost an afterthought, you feel like you're playing on a salad bar."

On A Friday also say some very complementary things about *Curfew*, which makes me feel like my life isn't totally wasted. And indeed, if this humble and overworked editor's gushing opinions can help On A Friday towards the megasuccess they are due for then *Curfew* will have achieved at least one useful thing in its time. And successful On A Friday *will* be. No ifs and buts with this lot. This time next year they will have outgrown all the venues they talk about and for once I think I may just have got it right. Are they ready to be stars?

Tom: "People sometimes say we take things too seriously, but it's the only way you'll get anywhere. We're not going to sit around and wait and just be happy if something turns up. We are ambitious. You have to be."

Many thanks to Ronan from *Curfew* magazine for permission to reprint this historic interview.